

KNOWING THE TRUTH

Colossians 1:3-20

Sometimes it is difficult to discover the truth about anything. If you have watched the political arena over the past several decades, you realize that what someone says can have an entirely different meaning to you than what it may have meant to the person who said it. For example, the idea of the American dream may mean that the government will take care of you from cradle to the grave. To others it might mean that you have the freedom to go as far as your talents and hard work will take you and that your children will have more opportunity that you or your parents had.

We have many adages or sayings we take for granted. Many times when we use an expression such as, "we have a government of the people, by the people and for the people," we don't really consider the full implication of what it means. Most of us think of such an assertion in terms of our right to vote and that we have a representative form of government. Such a statement might also imply the source, basis or world view of our society. Unless the concept "of, by, and for the people" is balanced with a strong underlying foundation of a Creator God to Whom we are ultimately responsible, then this concept or idea will evolve into secular humanism.

In the area of our Christianity we have many sayings that define our beliefs and principles by which we operate. We talk about being "saved" and yet many would have trouble giving a good definition of what "salvation" is all about. We speak of saints and some might think of people pictured in stained glass windows. We talk about being "under grace" and "not under the law" and think that it means the Ten Commandments no longer have to be observed. We say that "Jesus is Lord" and think that it simply means that He is Deity. We want to take a closer look at this statement regarding Jesus to see what it really does mean to say that Jesus is Lord. In many of Paul's letters the phrase "Lord Jesus Christ" is used and implies the recognition of the authority of Jesus.

Two main themes evident in the writings of Paul are related to *theology* and *practical living*. If we understand the theology correctly, then we will have better chance to be correct in the way we express practical living aspects in our daily lives. Without knowing the nature and character of God, we will have little idea of the target toward which we must direct our lives. The ultimate goal to which we must project is to be transformed into the image of Jesus.

Our Lord by Faith - 1:3-8

³We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard *of it* and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:3-8 (NASB95)

Paul recognized that God is the Source of every blessing. He considered the Christians of the church at Colossae and their faithfulness a real blessing. Notice that Paul offered his thanks to God and not to the people since he realized that it was God Who was working in them and this was what was being manifested in their lives. Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified as the means of salvation. Since Paul was an apostle of Jesus, he referenced everything to Christ. In identifying the God to Whom he prayed, Paul referred to Him as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, here we see the term "Lord" associated with the name of Jesus. The word LORD

is used in reference to one who is in (or has) authority. When we call Jesus, Lord, it is not an acknowledgment of His deity but of His authority. We can agree to His deity, recognizing that He is truly God and yet never submit to His authority. It is only by coming under His authority that we are saved.

It would appear that many commentators see two things for which Paul is thankful: their faith in Jesus and their love for other Christians. These two things should be and will be closely associated. To many people, the idea of “Christian faith” is that they acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross and was raised from the dead. So far, we could make the argument that Muslims acknowledge this same set of tenets. In fact, James wrote that the demons know there is one God. Since our objective is to know the truth, then we need to have the right concept of what “faith in Jesus” entails. We’ve heard teaching on this in the past and we know that such saving faith involves trusting, relying upon, and believing which will lead to or result in an outward expression of actions (or evidence) that we would call obedience.

A natural outgrowth of faith in Christ is that we will love others and it is very difficult to really love others without having been transformed by the love of God in our own lives. This transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit that lives in us as a result of our having been born of the Spirit and having the uncreated life of God resident within us. This can only happen by believing and trusting in God’s provision for our salvation that He provided in the death of Jesus on the cross. When we trust in and rely upon what He has done to pay the price for our redemption, we identify with His death and in doing so we die to self so that we may live for Him and the life we live is powered by the Holy Spirit Who lives in us.

If you read these verses carefully, you will notice that what Paul is giving thanks for is the hope that is laid up for them in heaven. The information in verse 4 is related to when he added them to his prayer agenda – since the time he heard about their faith and love. It is easy to read these verses and conclude that they had faith and love because of the hope that was laid up for them in heaven. If the reason we have faith (believe) and love others is because we think we will be rewarded by getting to go to heaven, then we are very close to operating from selfish motives or having a rewards mentality or even to viewing our new life in Christ as fire insurance.

The hope that is laid up for us in heaven is related to our coming into possession of all the things that we (now) have in Christ by faith. We have many great and precious promises that are ours by virtue of having been born again and having become a child of God. This is our inheritance which we have “by faith” during this life, but we will possess in the eternal realm.

The truth of the gospel message includes the reality of being redeemed from slavery to sin and self and becoming a new creation in Christ so that we are equipped to live in the presence of Holy God and be identified as His Child. This message, according to Paul, had been proclaimed in all the world. Compare this statement to what Christ said in Matthew 24:14: “and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Many people today will argue (with their last breath) that Jesus was talking about something that has not yet happened and the “end” is a reference to the end of the world. The truth is likely that the reference was to the end of and destruction of Jerusalem (which happened around 70 A.D.) and the “all the world” meant the known world. According to John Gill’s commentary, we see the following:

and by this time [Christ’s followers] had delivered the joyful message to the greater part of the world, which is sometimes meant by all the world, and the whole world; or it had been now preached in all the known and habitable parts of the world by one apostle and another, some being sent into one part, and some into another; so that the grace of God appeared to all men, and the doctrine of it had been preached to every

creature under the heaven, according to Christ's commission; the Gospel of the kingdom was to be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, before the end of the Jewish state came, or before the destruction of Jerusalem, which was not many years after the writing of this epistle.

Do you think that discovering the truth of Paul's statement in conjunction with the intended meaning of Matthew Chapter 24 would influence our understanding of events that are happening today? A lot of the literature we find today regarding end time events (such as the "Left Behind" stories) is based on a particular interpretation of Matthew 24 which is not (necessarily) in agreement with Paul's statement that the gospel had gone out to all the world.

The result of the gospel message is that it will bear fruit. The fruit could be both the increase in the number of Christians and/or the growth and increase of the attributes of Christ within the lives of individual Christians. Since the gospel is the Word of God, we have the assurance that when it goes forth, it will not return void, but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. Evidence of this growth among the Christians at Colossae was their love and concern for Paul that was based on their spiritual kinship or unity they had in the Holy Spirit.

Lord in Our Living - 1:9-14

⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14 (NASB95)

Not only did Paul thank God for the hope laid up for those who are in Christ (which points to the future), he also prayed that they would grow in knowledge, wisdom and understanding for the present time. Notice that it was not just general knowledge that Paul desired for them, but it was knowledge of God's will. So many times we find Christians who are uncertain of God's will for their lives. The way to discover His will is to begin with what you know about God's will and be faithful to that. He will then reveal more and more of the specifics of what His will is for your life. We can start with Micah 6:8 which tells us "he has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" We could add that we are to love our neighbor as our selves. We also know that we are to observe God's commandments and **not** follow the way of the world. As we show faithfulness in what we already know of God's will, then the rest will be revealed to us.

As we discover God's will, we need to follow it with spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. If we just blindly follow God's will without such wisdom and understanding, then we become like the Pharisees who found fault in Christ for healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. When we follow God's will in the proper way, the results will be that our lives will be in agreement with the character of Christ or that we will "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord."

Paul gave an extensive list of what he meant by walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. The first and overarching consideration is that we are pleasing to God. God is pleased by those who do His will, keep His commandments, follow His precepts, etc. If we do these things, then the results will be that we will bear fruit in the works of faith that God had foreordained that we are to accomplish. As we walk in His will, we will find confirmation of and increase in our knowledge of God. It is in His will that we discover the power available to us through the Holy Spirit by which we are enabled to be pleasing to Him without wavering and giving up. We

cannot do this in our own strength. Realizing what God is doing in our lives will result in joy that comes from the assurance we have that we belong to Him and that we are secure in Him. Paul contrasted this condition with those who are still in the kingdom of darkness and have not accepted the forgiveness and redemption that are available through the work of salvation that Christ did for all who would received Him.

Lord over the Universe - 1:15-17

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:15-17 (NASB95)

Jesus is the perfect picture of God Whom we cannot otherwise see. The Greek word translated image is *iekon* from which we get the English word icon. God is Spirit and His physical appearance is immaterial (no pun intended). The real issue is *what is His nature and character?* These are what Jesus showed us by His life. In Hebrews 1:3, we see that Jesus is the “express image” of God’s being. The Greek word translated “express image” is the word from which we get the English word “character.” In John’s gospel, Jesus is called the Word of God, which could be thought of as God communicating Himself to us.

Paul addressed the deity of Jesus in terms of the creation. Jesus is referred to as the “firstborn over all creation.” The Greek word for firstborn is *prototokus* from which we derive our word prototype or model. This position of firstborn also speaks of privilege and rank over everything created. Why does He have this position? Because He created everything. “For by Him (Jesus, God the Son) all things were created.” When it says, **all things** it means physical and spiritual, visible and invisible. Not only were all things created **by** Him, all things were created **for** Him. We might say that we have a universe of God, by God and for God. Even more amazing, we find that all things continue in the state of “being” because of his creative power.

We could summarize these three verses by saying that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God to man. He is the most complete picture of God that we can ever have and is our model regarding man’s relationship to God especially with respect to man being created in the image of God. Jesus is the pioneer and role model for all of creation – the first born of every creature. He can be all these things because He is one with the Creator God. Creation is more than just the physical world; it extends even to the spiritual world. Everything was created by God and for His purpose.

Lord of His Church - 1:18-20

¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:18-20 (NASB95)

Some groups believe and argue that Jesus (the Christ) was a created being. How can this be if He is before all things? Being “before all things” means that He is preexistent before creation.

In a parallel way, Paul presents Christ as the firstborn from the dead and therefore the first (or type) of the new creation of the human race – those who have been born again. In this way, He is head of the church or the new creation. Therefore, not only is Christ the Creator and Head of the universe (the original creation), He is also the Head of the New Creation (the Church).

Paul is building a parallel comparison. First of all Jesus Christ was the agent of creation in the beginning and, consequently, He is Lord of the created universe. Next, in the New Creation which is exemplified by the church, we see that Jesus Christ is Lord there also. Paul makes the argument that Jesus was the "first- born from the dead" to show that the Resurrection was the evidence of His right to be head of this new creation. This term also holds promise that those who accept His Lordship will be raised also. The church is made up of those that have died to self and been raised to new life in the same way as the burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Some groups in Paul's day taught that Jesus Christ was a lesser God than God the Father. Paul's answer to them is that the fullness of the Godhead is in Christ Jesus and that there is no conflict with God the Father and God the Son.

When sin entered the world, it caused all of the creation to be separated from God. In the beginning, God put the dominion of all the earth under the care of man. When man stopped serving God and started serving Satan, then the dominion of the earth was acquired by Satan. In His death on the Cross, Jesus regained the authority over all of heaven and earth and established His church to be about the business of bringing about a reconciliation of all things to Himself *in deed*.

The purpose of the fullness of the Godhead being in Christ was for the completion of His mission and that was to reconcile all things to Himself. The Greek word translated "reconcile" literally means "to be thoroughly changed." We see that Jesus made peace through His blood. This peace was a result of His paying the debt caused by our sin and this opened up the way for us to be restored to fellowship with God. Once this fellowship was restored, then the business of reconciliation – thoroughly changing everything – could take place.